

SOME MENTAL AND SOCIAL INHERITANCES.

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If the time is not yet quite passed when it is unnecessary to address some audiences in a semi-apologetic manner on subjects more or less intimately associated with the development theory, the time certainly *is* passed when one need have any fear that by so doing he is likely to bring upon himself the condemnation, or, to put it more mildly, the displeasure of those whom he addresses. Neither need he entertain a doubt when thus treating his subject that he is in a measure aiming away above his mark, for now that biological science is studied on the basis of evolution by everybody, or that everybody has, to some extent, become acquainted with this tendency of thought, the popular mind is in a condition of receptivity rather than of antagonism. As a matter of course I use the term "everybody" in a qualified sense, for it is undoubted that there are still those whose prejudices, or whose timidity, place them in an attitude of defiance, or of defence, to the theory in question, just as for a long time there were numerous worthy souls who declaimed against the theory of gravitation. On this occasion my "everybody" embraces the members of the Hamilton Association.

There can scarcely be a doubt that ever since the dawn of human reason, or, if this be too strong, ever since the observing faculties of man became worthy of the name, it was noted by some that this or the other person was marked by some quality or defect that characterized his father or his grandfather. Of a good runner it would be observed that his father was also one; and of a poor stone-thrower or bowman, that his son was no better. In primitive conditions of society it would be only along such lines that observations of this kind were made, because in these conditions man's attention was solely directed to the procuring of food.

With advanced conditions, mental traits would claim a share of

attention, but from the earliest times until our own day it has been impossible to adduce anything like philosophical reasons to account, not only for individual, but for racial peculiarities. Very glibly we could quote, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge," but the question always remained, why did the fathers eat the sour grapes in the first place?

This paper is written as an attempt to account in a measure for some human predilections by referring them to early conditions of society—to conditions that must have existed for many thousands of years, and which, notwithstanding the fact that for some hundreds of years such conditions have not existed, yet exhibit their persistency as a part of our being.

In a purely savage state it must needs be that the supply of food is both precarious and inconstant, and of savage people more than of any others it may be truly said, "They eat to live, and live to eat." In time they acquire tastes for various kinds of amusements and pastimes, but eating is the main business of life—it is not a means, it is an end—the end. It therefore behoves each member of the family, or of the tribe, to lose no opportunity of securing that which is necessary for the subsistence of himself and of his fellows. He runs his prey down, or he attacks it with missiles, or he shoots arrows at it, or he lays a trap for it, or he inveigles it into some place from which escape is impossible, but in any event his wit is always superior to brute faculties.

As population increases the supply of animal food diminishes, and man's mental resources are more largely drawn upon to circumvent the tactics of his prey, for the beasts themselves become more knowing.

Even when our suppositious savage is not actually engaged in hunting, he will not fail to avail himself of any chance that fortune may throw in his way to secure an animal. Even to him, habit has become second nature. He goes in chase sometimes merely for excitement; he kills because he loves to kill; hunting has become one of his pleasures. In other words, untold repetitions of such acts through many hundreds of generations have transmitted a tendency to slay the lower animals—a tendency which remains long after man has arrived at a stage of advancement when it is no longer necessary that he should kill at all, and we find accordingly a

betrayal of this tendency—of this murderous instinct—on the part of all and sundry, young and old, in civilized society.

The small boy delights in throwing stones at anything, or at nothing; it would appear that he *must* throw, and as he becomes less and less of a small boy he indulges himself with a catapult, a pea-shooter, a sling, a bow-and-arrow, a revolver, and at last a rifle. The hit-and-knock-down feeling is as strong in him as if it were a necessity of his existence.

Many older people gratify this predatory instinct in the pursuit of what they call *game*. Once, or oftener, a year, and with as much regularity as marks the course of nature in other respects, hard-headed business men become uneasy—they tell us they are getting “run down,” that they require “a whiff of country air,” “a smell of the pine woods,” and so on, and they are quite sincere, for the old-time instinct is simply re-asserting itself in this desire for a “run out-of-doors,” or “a spell in the bush,” but above all, in the case of the hunter, there is the desire to kill something. A deer is a prize, a bear is glory! So many brace of ducks or other game-fowl is something to boast about until next season—not that this kind of food is a necessity, but solely and simply on account of an indescribable pleasure experienced in the taking away of life!

In the not-long-ago when trans-continental travellers on the Pacific railways, in crossing the prairies, happened to see a buffalo within rifle range, shots were fired at the animal from the car windows to gratify a spirit of pure savagery, for there was no hope that should a buffalo be killed its carcase or its hide would reward the ah—the ah—the sportsman. Sportsman indeed! the savage rather, for what cared he though the poor brute should linger for days in agony before lying down to die?

Another class of so-called sportsmen to whom such opportunities are denied, indulge their manly tastes in the slaughter of pigeons released from traps, or they commit sad havoc among chipmunks, robins and other ferocious creatures that infest the woods near home.

In all ranks and conditions we find manifested the same spirit of slaughter, the same desire to inflict pain, and the same gratification consequent upon the practice of cruelty upon the brute creation. On no other theory than that of savage impulse does it seem possible

to account for the terrible atrocities inflicted by young people on the dumb beasts. With what ghoulish zest do they pluck the members of a fly! And how gleefully do they witness the contortions of the mutilated creature in its vain attempts at locomotion.

I knew a boy who once took a pair of callow Baltimore orioles from their beautiful nest, and, pinning them wing to wing, hung them across a branch, leaving them thus to perish while he stood by in gleeful admiration of the grief-stricken parents trying to entice the young ones back to their home. For this boy, at the time, I predicted nothing less than a termination of his career on the gallows, but he ultimately became a captain in the Salvation Army!

It is well for our race that with increasing years, that is to say, as we get beyond boyhood; that period of lifetime which is most pronouncedly savage, a change comes over the spirit that dictates such acts. But this not always. For the records of the police courts frequently bring to light many acts of almost incredible cruelty as inflicted by mature persons on children and on the lower animals. Such perpetrators are veritable savages, notwithstanding their existence among ourselves, and they should be made to feel the arguments of the law and of humanity, physically, for the simple reason that they are totally unable to understand what they owe to civilization by any other means.

Closely related to this phase of persistence in savagery is another inheritance affording pleasure of a low kind, namely, that which arises from the seeing of animals inflicting pain on one another, and this continues to afford enjoyment for a much longer period of the modern savage's life, and it is participated in by a vastly larger number of people. Hence cock-fights, dog-fights, bull-fights and man-fights, which are still ranked among the amusements of the populace.

If these things, or rather the desires which prompt them, are not savage inheritances, what are they? And that tens of thousands among us take a shocking delight in perusing accounts of how these things are done, is evident from the amount of space that is devoted to details in the columns of newspapers which regard themselves, and are regarded by us, as exponents of public opinion.

Games of chance are of religious origin, that is to say, they were at first employed for purposes of divination, but in course of

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time as stakes were laid, or bets made on the possible results, the element of gambling found its way in, and there is no feature of primitive or savage life so universally prevalent as is this, and there is no inheritance from the long-ago which has clung to civilized men with more persistence than the spirit of gambling, which is neither more nor less than an unintelligent and wholly blind trust in luck, and it is notorious that among no class of people more than among confirmed gamblers is abject superstition so supreme, and superstition of every kind is an inheritance for which we have to thank our savage ancestry.

Games of skill may have originated as mimic combats in friendly guise. It would be difficult to name one which does not involve loss and defeat on the one hand with capture and victory on the other. They all appear to be modifications of old-time pug-nacity—of the days when family feuds and tribal wars were maintained fully as much for the sake of gore and glory as for aggrandizement. Most of our popular games, whether indoor or outdoor, demand that something shall be hit, or some person or some place captured, and so persistent is the ancient idea of war involved in the playing of such games, that even in many of the quietest and most thoughtfully conducted ones, we speak of the pieces employed as "men," and as men whom it is a duty to "take" if possible.

In athletic sports, again, muscle is, of necessity, the chief prerequisite, and while it must be patent to everybody that although in these almost twentieth century days there is comparatively little need for the exercise of excessive brute force, we find many of our fellow-beings devoting their lives to the attainment of notoriety or of celebrity, as the case may be, in walking, running, wrestling and rowing, not for recreation or occasional diversion only, but as so-called "professionals," while those of us who for many reasons may be unable to practice such exercises ourselves, manifest a decidedly lively interest in the doings of these latter-day savages, even to the extent of betting heavy odds for or against a particular contestant, in this way laying ourselves alike open to the charge of exemplifying by inheritance an ancient savage predilection, for betting is but gambling, and all gambling operations are only the improved, refined, systemetized, *i.e.*, evolutionized forms of deity or fetish placation or cajolery, practised universally in the early days of human society, as I have already said.

We are too apt to consider the belief in luck, ghosts, fairies, witches, dreams, amulets, charms and premonitions as being entertained by ignorant people only. A very little inquiry will serve to dispel this too partial view. Superstition is apparently spiritualistic. It has been transmitted to us from a time when some reason had to be assigned for phenomena that were inexplicable on natural grounds, and it is really astonishing to what an extent it maintains its hold upon the minds of intelligent (or, shall I say, of otherwise intelligent?) people. The belief in dreams is, perhaps, most widely spread, and chiefly among women. Lucky and unlucky times and seasons influence the actions of many persons whom it would be a mistake to characterize as weak-minded, only in so far as this inheritance from savagery is concerned.

Powerfully occult influences have always been attributed by primitive man to the heavenly bodies, and especially so to the moon, and in this year of grace, one thousand eight hundred and ninety-nine, there are farmers all over the world who regulate their sowing and planting, their killing of cows and pigs, by her phases, just as their wives take these into account in the making of butter and in the weaning of their infants. Even the weather is popularly regarded as being regulated by Luna's influence, and so wise a man as Sir John Herschel actually prepared a tabular statement illustrative of his belief, but of course no possible use can be made of it by meteorologists of to-day. Sir John tried to square his acquired astronomical knowledge with his inherited tendency to the crudities of astrology.

One of the first indications given by the new-born infant that he is henceforth to be regarded as a member of society is the making of a noise, or as Shakespeare has it in King Lear:

"When we are born we *cry*, that we are come
To this great stage of fools,"

and elsewhere he says; "We came crying hither."

From this time forward it may be observed that noise of one kind or other, often merely for its own sake, enters largely into many of the relations and pursuits of life.

According to the theory on which this paper is based, the child exhibits much more of the savage than does the full-grown man, and

it may be said without a particle of exaggeration that *minus* noise a child is nowhere. So tacitly do parents recognize this as a fact, that they actually provide their children with the means of gratifying this propensity. Spoons, tin pans, drums and wind-instruments of "fearful and wonderful" construction occupy a place in every juvenile chorus. When a little more advanced in years the sweetest of music seems to have no charms for sturdy boyhood comparable to that produced by the rat-a-tat-tat of a stick drawn rapidly over the pickets of a fence or the bars of a window grating, the result being not unlike that from the favorite rattle of most primitive peoples.

To grown-up boys the production of loud and discordant sounds affords joy ineffable. I have listened with pleasure (not æsthetic, but scientific pleasure,) to a group of boys from ten to fourteen years of age, sitting on a pile of lumber during a summer evening, enjoying themselves to the full as they vied with each other in giving utterance to the most unearthly howls and yells.

During the periods of maturity and old age the noise producing proclivity is less noticeable only because it is more under control, for the exercise of thought is not calculated to encourage the making of unmeaning sounds, unless under emotional influences, when it can scarcely be held that the judgment is responsible. In connection with political triumphs, victories in war, celebrations, and popular rejoicings of every kind, nothing short of lusty cheers and the discharge of firearms seem to satisfy the average human being in his desire to testify gratification. On such occasions "three cheers and a tiger" indicate the highest attainable point of happiness.

In process of time we have harmonized the dissonant utterances of our ancient forefathers. We have formed a gamut of such notes as the voice is capable of producing. From the bow-string and the reed we have elaborated the piano and the organ, and just in so far as we are capable of appreciating refined vocal and instrumental utterances are we judged to possess musical culture, *i. e.*, are we reckoned to be above primitivism.

In the gentle rhythmical motion, or the rapid whirl of the "mazy dance," it is not difficult to guess shrewdly as to the sources.

When the original dance was not of a religious character it was either to anticipate or to celebrate victory in a fight, and in the civilized forms of this amusement, so far as the latter origin is con-

cerned, we observe evident traces of the advance, the attack, the capture and the retreat. We see the votaries of this art marching in single file round the room. They effect flank movements, they take ambush by devious routes, they seize their adversaries, they simulate a struggle, and eventually succeed in placing the captives (usually fair ones) in a place of safety. Single dances like Ghillie Callum and the jig may be interpreted with reference to recitals of individual prowess in presence of the foe, accompanied by expressions of contempt, and by ridicule of the enemy's valor.

Even in our more personal and domestic habits it seems easy to discover some intimate relations between ourselves and our far-removed forefathers. I may refer just by mere mention to the fondness of some for half cooked or nearly raw meat, and to the not uncommon relish of others for animal food, especially fowl, in a condition that verges on what some would call putridity, but which is known to the *gourmets* as simply "gamey," and yet we shudder at the thought of a Sioux or of a Hottentot who regales himself on the decaying carcasses that fortune may throw in his way.

Again, many of us who think we can afford to pity those of such depraved taste, betray our own prehistorically acquired instincts in a manner scarcely less remarkable when we exhibit a fondness for rotten or rotting cheese. What a tit-bit is a lump of the rare old mitey article! And how appreciatively does the admirer of it smack his lips at what he calls its "nutty flavor!"

If I am not in error, vegetarians declaim respecting the use of flesh as food, not only because of what they declare to be its unfitness for this purpose, but on account of the cruelty and inhumanity that are involved in the necessary slaughter of the animals, which is equivalent to a declaration of these people's belief that the custom is a savage one, and yet one of the most highly prized vegetable preparations is thought to be edible only when it is far gone towards putrescence.

It is, indeed, not improbable that from the consumption of decayed, and consequently fermented vegetable substances, there has arisen in so many widely sundered portions of the world the desire to indulge in alcoholic intoxicants, although it is not always necessary that fermentation should take place, for the desired result sometimes follows from the consumption of a vegetable in its

original condition. In the northeastern part of Siberia there grows a somewhat rare mushroom, an average specimen of which, by means of an exceedingly peculiar and disgusting process, is capable of producing intoxication in all the members of a large family. Still, even in this case, it may be that the fungus is in a decayed state before it is eaten, so that it may be wrong to speak of it as being in its original or fresh condition.

Closely related to intoxicants are narcotics, and it would be hard to say which has claim to priority in use. Neither is it easy to divine why savages or any one else ever thought of such a ridiculous and apparently wholly unnatural process as that of smoking.

Perhaps they first chewed or snuffed the material, and the use of pipes may have been an after-thought for religious purposes, enabling the smoke to be whiffed as an offering to the cardinal points and to the sky. On any supposition the habit of smoking is purely a savage one; and although, so far as we are aware, our forbears knew of no such practice, it is amazing how kindly many of them took to the use of tobacco, quite as much so, indeed, as the Indian took to rum. In both cases it may have been that long dormant instincts were awakened. Who can say?

We all understand what is meant by savage finery, but do not we ourselves show some atavism in this respect? Do we not really enjoy a display of "fuss and feathers"? We do not pierce our noses and lips for rings, nor tattoo our faces, because it would be inconvenient so to do; but whenever a ring can be worn to advantage, whenever a chain of the precious metal can be displayed, wherever we can attach feathers, ribbons, tinsel or gew-gaws of any kind, we make the best possible use of our opportunities.

Members of the sterner sex may deny that there is any tendency on *their* part to go *very* far in this direction, but it would seem pretty plain that we are all, to a great extent, what are known as the "slaves of fashion;" that in this, as in so many other respects, we are "A' John Tamson's bairns," for if we but give the male portion of the community a chance to figure in the procession of some secret society, or in the ranks of a military display, at some high-class ball or levee, or in a grand civic demonstration, we find the "lords of creation" adorned in "full fig" with aprons, sashes, belts, gold lace, medals, badges and other regalia, in which they

strut about with fully as much consequence and pomposity as characterize the movements of an Indian chief when acting as Master of the Ceremonies at a big pow-wow on the prairie.

Even tattooing, to which exception has been made with respect to our faces, holds its ground to some extent, but chiefly among boys, sailors and lumbermen. Women seldom indulge this savage taste, probably owing chiefly to the fact that its consequences are too permanent. It admits of no compliance with changing fashion, so they prefer another not less savage, but more variable method, for the purpose of heightening their charms by means of color.

One of the pests, the manifestations of whose primitive predilections meet us almost at every turn, is the jack-knife sculptor, a modern savage who, in imitation of his ancient congener, makes his mark upon all available surfaces, as if either to remind himself on a future visit that he has "been there" before or to acquaint the other members of his tribe that he has travelled past this spot. He will even laboriously carve his initials or his "totem," which is often much more objectionable, in the hardest stone, and take his departure with the happy consciousness that he has performed a duty or fulfilled a mission, feeling at the same time perfectly ready to repeat the operation as opportunity presents itself. Other mediums sometimes take the place of the knife, but in any case the man who has inherited this low propensity is impelled by some means to indicate his presence, even to the spitting of tobacco juice on every painted or polished surface he passes by, and the whiter the surface the better is his object attained. He is a nineteenth century survival of the cave-man, and refrains from committing murder only because he has a wholesome regard for the terrors of the law.

The prevalence of crime is among the surest evidences of the savage strain which by its persistency continues to affect the life-blood of civilization. Only by an arousal of the baser passions can deeds of blood and plunder be perpetrated, and that these passions remain so capable of gaining complete mastery, goes to show in how many of us still rankle the aboriginal desires to waylay, to make war, to kill, and to increase our possessions by appropriating those of our neighbors.

In a very summary and imperfect manner I have thus touched upon a few of the social and mental qualities which, as they ap- ear

to me, we have inherited from the long distant past ; but as we are all disposed to do some thinking on our own account, it is inevitable that we should disagree respecting one or more of the positions I have assumed. This, however, is a matter of small consequence ; the main point is that we do not fail to regard our highest moral, social, political, artistic and scientific achievements as intellectual developments which had their beginnings far away back in the stream of time, and these, too, chiefly in that most natural of all instincts, the instinct of self-preservation ; and we should value our acquirements the more and not the less on this account.

We esteem ripened fruit none the less because it retains well-marked evidences of the original bud from which it sprung, and we see no reason to despise an ingenious bit of mechanism on account of its production from crude materials.

That so many of our inherited proclivities bear such strong resemblances to savage ways is not only a proof of what is called the "Descent of Man," but they go to show how exceedingly brief has been his so-called civilized condition as compared with the endurance of his primeval state. The effect of habits practiced during a lifetime cannot be removed in a day, a month, or it may be a year ; neither need it be expected that all traces of customs and usages engendered and maintained during ages in a primitive state of society can be eradicated in the course of a few centuries in more advanced circumstances.

That the time will ever come in the history of our race when every tinge of the old life will be utterly removed is more than doubtful, even if it were desirable—indeed such a condition is inconceivable, for many of the supremest joys and pleasures of our being are inseparably connected with the gratification of tastes and desires engrafted upon our stock when hunting and fishing were necessities of individual, as warfare was of tribal, existence.

Our work is to modify, to refine, to elevate, to direct, and as may be found necessary for the common weal, to suppress old-time instincts.

In other words, civilization should be a process of natural growth—the result of small but steadily supplied increments to our knowledge, as a consequence of racial experiences.